



September 6, 2016

Comments on the EPA Proposed Plan for Cleanup of Portland Harbor Superfund Site

Submitted by email to harborcomments@epa.gov

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments. We attended an information session and reviewed several documents, including the Feasibility Study and the proposed Plan for Cleanup of the Portland Harbor Superfund Site before requesting an extension of the comment deadline. As you know, our request was denied.

Sixteen years and millions of dollars later, the plan is inadequate to protect human health. The Preferred Alternative I is chosen because it is relatively less expensive and will require only seven years of construction, rather than 60 years to conduct the cleanup. And yet still it will not permit fish from the harbor to be consumed by subsistence fishers. This is a serious violation of environmental justice values and one that the EPA should take seriously.

After one hundred years of pollution, a plan to remove only 8% of contaminants is inadequate. EPA and DEQ must take the time necessary to clean to a healthier level. It may cost more, but polluters should pay for this cleanup as they have profited by not preventing the pollution in the first place.

- The proposed plan to implement Alternative I is inadequate in that it does not clean up the harbor to sufficiently reduce the health risks associated with consumption of resident fish. In fact, none of the alternatives really reduces the health risks associated with consumption of fish from the Portland Harbor. After seven years of construction, Alternatives E and I are intended to “clean up” the river so that the fish advisory can be “relaxed” to 46 fish meals every 10 years for most people, and women who may breastfeed would be advised to have no more than 5 fish meals in 10 years! Furthermore, the Oregon Health Authority may then still determine that it is necessary to keep fish advisories in place, to limit the consumption of fish from the harbor, even after the PRGs and RAOs have been met.

- The proposed “one order of magnitude risk reduction from the No Action Alternative at completion of construction” for Alternative I (Feasibility Study p. 4-96) is wholly inadequate. It appears that the public is being asked to spend a great deal of money on a “solution” that does not truly address the problem.
- Risk estimates for fish consumption do not include additional risk from consumption of transient fish, such as salmon, that could be a large proportion of the subsistence diet. This makes the risk estimate an underestimate of the true risk, as opposed to the statement by EPA and/or the Lower Willamette Group that the estimates of risk are upper bound estimates.
- Alternatives F and G achieve the risk levels associated with the preliminary remediation goals but are rejected by EPA because they are more time consuming and increase construction but have greater impacts to the environment than Alternatives E and I. The proposed plan with the Preferred Alternative I is not protective of human health or the environment, so it is necessary to clean up the contamination to a healthier level. There has already been a great impact to the environment – that’s why the Portland Harbor is classified as a Superfund site(s). It only makes sense that that impact cannot be corrected without a large impact on the environment.
- Natural processes have not been able to significantly reduce the contamination problem over the past 50-100 years. Why would we expect them to do so now? In its Feasibility Study, it is stated that “Monitored natural recovery should be considered as a stand-alone remedy only when it would meet RAOs within a reasonable timeframe.” (FS p. E5-7) The amount of MNR proposed in this plan is so extensive that it appears to be nearly a stand-alone remedy for some portions of the site. Further, “Because the primary mechanism for MNR is through deposition, MNR is likely to be effective in the shortest amount of time in depositional environments... (USEPA 2005). “However, the majority of the site is transitional...” except RM 11 and 6 that are erosional under all flow conditions (FS p. 4-6). The Lower Willamette Group seems to have generated a plan that suffers greatly from wishful thinking.
- The proposed plan does not appear to consider long term changes in climate, changes in river level, increased salinity, frequent storms, scouring, or the potential for flooding upland areas. It does not consider the potential impacts of catastrophic climate change.
- There are nine remedial action objectives for this site, four of which are related to human health. RAO 2 and 3 are meant to reduce cancer and non-cancer risks to acceptable exposure levels for human consumption of COCs in fish and shellfish and to acceptable exposure levels for human direct contact through fishing, occupational and recreational exposures, or through drinking water supply. The levels of exposure reduction in the proposed plan do not achieve the remedial action objectives for human

health. The exposure levels remain unacceptable. Therefore, the proposed Plan and the proposed Preferred Alternative are inadequate and unacceptable.

- Tribal consultation appears to have been minimal. Or perhaps the EPA has ignored previous comments of First Nations, including The Yakama Nation. We find it appalling that exposure and risk levels remain extremely high for subsistence fishers, and especially for tribal members, even after the so-called “cleanup” is completed. This shows no respect for the rights of Tribes to eat fish and continue their cultural practices. This is unacceptable.
- The EPA appears to be attempting to save money but has not considered the full economic benefits of a serious cleanup. Where is consideration of the costs of illness, the loss of productivity, or the economic and social benefits of good health?

A proper plan for cleanup of the Portland Harbor would be based upon serious reduction of exposures to the hazardous pollutants that have been and continue to be released into the river. The plan in its current form fails to protect human health and therefore we cannot support it.

We incorporate by reference the comments of The Yakama Nation, Portland Harbor Community Coalition, Portland Audubon, and Willamette Riverkeeper.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

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Environmental Health Workgroup
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

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